

# Background and Rationale

A hallmark of the Rodrigo Duterte presidency is its bloody war against illegal drugs. Between 2016 and 2022, government sources indicate at least 6,000 people were killed during police anti-drug operations nationwide although unofficial estimates can go from 12,000 to 30,000 deaths (Wong 2022). Whether official or unofficial though, the thousands of deaths have warranted calls in 2018 by the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate.

Not surprisingly as well, the Philippine government has asked that these investigations cease. In late September 2022, the International Criminal Court (ICC) rejected a bid by the Philippine government to cease its investigation into the killing of drug suspects during the Duterte administration. To be fair, the punitive nature of such responses involving the application of excessive force are just one aspect of the Philippines' campaign against illegal drugs. The other aspects are of a rehabilitative nature. The drug problem is so complex as to warrant a multi-pronged approach.

A key element of all the operational thrusts of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) is the provision of treatment for drug users. In late 2016, a mega drug abuse treatment and rehabilitation center was opened in Nueva Ecija that can accommodate 10,000 beds. However, there are concerns raised about the forced nature of these drug rehabilitation treatments (Lasco and Yarcia 2022). While a mixture of methods is perhaps the best approach to take in relation to the complex and complicated problem of illegal drugs, it remains to be seen how the effectiveness of these different approaches can be measured.

Different countries have embarked on varied approaches. Anti-drug policies in many countries in Europe are oriented towards harm reduction and tolerance of certain types of drug consumption not only for medicinal purposes but also for leisure. In Latin America, however, there is an emphasis on restricting supply channels and interdiction. In countries like the Philippines, the drug problem is seen largely as a crime issue.

This webinar is part of a series on the anti-illegal drugs campaign in the Philippines. The first roundtable in December 2017, "Are We There Yet? What it Means to Win the Philippine War on Drugs" had resource persons touching on the goals (or absence thereof) of the anti-drug campaign of the Duterte administration. A second roundtable was held November 2018: "Planted Evidence: Is the Philippine War on Drugs a Sound Policy?" with resource persons discussing the soundness of the anti-drug policy.

## REFERENCES

Lasco, Gideon and Lee Edson Yarcia. 2022. The Politics of Drug Rehabilitation in the Philippines. *Health and Human Rights Journal* 24(1): 147—158.

Wong, Andrea Chloe. 2022. ICC pushes probe on the Philippines' drug war. *The Interpreter* (9 August 2022). Accessed at <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/icc-pushes-probe-philippines-drug-war>.



Organized by:

